

# Dornoch Games

## Sunny day with cloud of sadness



The parade to the games ground.

By Willie Mackay

SUMMER came to Dornoch just in time for the Dornoch Highland Games last Friday.

The crowd had substantially increased compared to previous years with once again many exiles making the trip home for Games day.

Chieftain Jimmy Macdonald welcomed everyone but before officially opening the games he mentioned how a cloud of sadness hangs over Dornoch and everyone's thoughts are with the family of Lachlan Simpson who is still missing.

There was a police presence at the games with officers wishing to speak with friends of Lachlan's and they still welcome any snippets of information that can help.

The Chieftain's Parade from the Square had to be witnessed to believe the crowd which had gathered. What a spectacle, and led in style by the town's own Dornoch Pipe Band with Pipe Major Willie Fraser at the front.

It was very fitting that, as they entered the Meadows Park, they played the pipe tune, Dornoch Highland Gathering.

The "local" morning events went well with Thomas Luxton, Dornoch, winning three trophies. Luxton was the first winner of the Willie Munro Shield which was gifted by Jean Munro, his widow, and family. Willie was a regular Heavy athlete in his day and it's fitting that a local name is the first to be engraved on the shield.

Luxton also won the Gashagaich Shield for most points in the Local Heavies Under-25 age group as well as the Migdale Cup for top local Heavy.

Sandy Mackay, Dornoch, actually beat Luxton in four events but had to retire injured with two events to go.

On the dancing platform the under 12 local section winner was Laura Wilson from Culbokie who took home the Mrs More Memorial Shield, while the 13-15 age group was won by Jenna Wilson, Dingwall, who was presented with the Grant Cup.

The Open Dancing entertained the grandstand spectators all afternoon and it was Anna Morrison, Inverness, whose lightness of feet and good balance caught the judges' eye for her to win the Sheila Waring Memorial Cup for the Highland Fling and the Sword Dance, as well as the John Grant & Sons Cup for the Seann Truibhas and the Sailors' Hornpipe.

The girls aged 13-15 competing for the Marion Munro School of Dancing saw 20 dances performed to a high standard and Dingwall girl, Jenna Wilson, took the honours with Kate Munro in runner-up spot.

The Senior Dancers compete for the Gardner Cup and once again Stacey Webster, Wick, won

the event with straight wins in the Highland Fling and Sword Dance. In the piping section, John McLaren, Invergordon, won the March as well as the Strathspey and Reel to take home the Balblair Challenge Cup for the Local Junior Piping.

In the Open Piping there was one of the biggest entries ever at the Games with eight senior pipers battling it out for the trophies.

It was Brian Lamond, Dunfermline, who lifted both the William Cairns Sutherland Memorial Shield as well as the Mrs Carnegie Miller Medal and pushed Nick Hudson into second place each time.

The Junior Piping Champion had a long trip from South Uist to compete but Calum Craib showed the others how to play and won the MacPherson Challenge Quaich.

A clash of dates with the Inverkeithing Games saw the usual cyclists opting to race there instead of the long trip to Dornoch.

To make sure there is a cycling programme for the 2016 Dornoch Highland Games, they will have local cycling events on the programme as East Sutherland Wheelers are a sizeable club. There will be races which are outside of the national Highland Games Association but still offer quality racing for the spectators on the day. It might encourage some of the local cyclists to compete against the top national cyclists and test their ability.

The Lord Migdale Medal, generously gifted by Mary Thomson, is competed for over four track and three field events and Ewan Bradley, Inverness, gathered 22 points to win this much prized medal, one which his father had lifted several times in his competing days, many years ago.

This pushed Finlay Munro, Tain, into second place with Stuart Mackay, Dornoch, third.

There can be no disputing the popularity of the Heavy Events with the crowd three to four deep in places at that side of the field.

Heavies coming to Dornoch from all across Scotland is the norm, but this year there were also two Polish brothers, Sebastian and Lucas Wenta, and Thor Gylason from Iceland. There was also a second pair of brothers with Lorne and David Colthart from Blair Atholl.

As well as the spectacle of the hammers flying more than 100ft through the air and watching 56lbs of metal being thrown over 16ft high overhead, there were two record attempts and the difficult Dornoch caber was tossed several times, all adding to the excitement for the crowd.

When the results show that the top three places had 12, 23 and 24 points, it proves what a quality field there was this year.

Lucas Wenta had three wins to his brother Sebastian's two, but after six events it was Lorne Colthart, Blair Atholl, who had 21 points to

Sebastian's 20. The final heavy event was the caber and it decided the competition with both Wenta brothers first equal, pushing Colthart back into third and gave Sebastian Wenta the other point that he needed to take away the Robin Miller Medal and the Alister Shaw Memorial Cup.

The record attempts were in the Light Hammer, where Lorne Colthart, a specialist Hammer thrower, did actually exceed the 1968 record of 141ft 9ins set by Bill Anderson but his throw landed outside the boundary line so didn't count. Colthart just missed Anderson's 116ft Heavy Hammer record by four foot.

Lucas Wenta had two attempts at 17ft in the Weight for Height event to beat David Barron's 16ft 11ins but could not quite manage it.

As the caber tossing was underway, the athletes lined up for the obstacle races with Ewan Bradley, Inverness, winning the adult section with Neil Wyatt, Dunbar, in second place.

The juniors was won by Sam Wilson, Oxford, who got over the slippery board before Cameron Walsh, Dornoch.

If the Heavies attract many visiting spectators, the locals favourite is surely Tilt the Bucket, with 15 pairs deciding to test their skill and nerve to guide a long pole through a small hole under a bucket full of water whilst being pushed down the track in a wheelbarrow.

An event unique to Dornoch and one that has long been the climax to their Games Day.

This year they had Lisa McKnight and Emma Mackay trying to win their third consecutive title and, in the fine tradition of sport, retain the barrow for good!

It was not to be, as although they won through the qualifying heats and were in first equal place in the extra round to decide the winners, and they managed to guide the pole through the gap - they also got well soaked as the bucket emptied anyway.

So it was Yorkshire's Dan and Mitch who lifted the 2015 Tilt the Bucket honours.

Those with energy left made their way back to Meadows Park for the Games Dance to enjoy the music of Blue Ridge, but most of Dornoch, Camore and Embo, heard the music for free anyway!

As always the proceeds from games day help run the 2016 Hogmanay Street Party.

It will be a special year for Dornoch in 2016 with the town celebrating 400 years of golf in the royal burgh and there are plenty of both community and golfing events planned.

Saturday 13th August, 2016, is the date of the Dornoch Street Party which will celebrate the 400 years using themes of music, food, and other activities spanning the period from 1616, when official records show that golf was first played in Dornoch.

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